Teacher's Perception of Driving Factors to EFL Students' Reading Difficulties and Coping Strategies

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Abstract

This study explores the driving factors behind EFL students' reading difficulties and the coping strategies employed by teachers. Previous studies about similar research mostly conducted overseas. This indicated a lack of attention to students' English reading skills in Indonesia. Several consequences can occur if English teachers in Indonesia are unaware of the importance of students English reading skills learning. These include inadequate preparation, limited vocabulary growth, poor comprehension skills, reduced motivation, and missed opportunities (Nanda, 2020). This research conducted at an Islamic senior high school in Jember, East Java, Indonesia, the research utilizes a qualitative case study design to delve into teachers' perceptions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with a female EFL teacher. The findings identify key obstacles, including limited vocabulary, restricted exposure to the target language, and insufficient practice opportunities. To address these issues, teachers use strategies such as teaching the alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness exercises, vocabulary-building activities, and providing additional reading materials. The study highlights the importance of targeted interventions focusing on vocabulary and practice to enhance reading proficiency. However, limitations include the small sample size and reliance on self-reported data. Future research should involve larger, more diverse samples to validate these findings. This research offers valuable insights into EFL challenges and suggests practical solutions for improving reading instruction, thereby supporting students' academic and personal success.

Keywords: EFL Reading Difficulties; Teacher's Perceptions; Coping Strategies; Qualitative Case Study

Introduction

This research was conducted to get to know about teacher's perception of driving factors to EFL students' reading difficulties and coping mechanism.

Specifically in one of Islamic senior high schools in Jember, West Java, Indonesia. That participated by one of female English teacher who has teach in that school for more than ten years.

First of all, the first thing that explained in this part is about the crucial position of English language globally. English language being widely used and preferred by many learners. The demand for English proficiency increases each year (Alsagoff et al., 2012), prompting the need for EFL learners in Indonesia to start learning the language early to fully benefit from it. Mastery of all language aspects, including reading, writing, listening, and speaking, is essential for effective use of English. Among these, reading is fundamental for students to understand texts (Beatrice, 2008). However, Indonesian students face challenges in learning English (Songbatumis, 2017) due to its foreign nature, requiring time for familiarity (Akbari, 2015). Other obstacles include limited vocabulary, difficulty with grammatical structures, lack of background knowledge, distractions, slow reading speed, cultural differences, and lack of interest (Songbatumis, 2017).

English teachers play a pivotal role in the teaching and learning process (Bakkenes & Vermunt, 2010). The main goal of English language teaching is to enable students to use the language for communication (Mulatu & Regassa, 2022). Jose and Raja (2011) emphasize that teachers should avoid hindering reading activities and create environments conducive to effective reading. Teachers are essential resources for developing students' reading habits. Their advice and encouragement can significantly improve students' reading comprehension. Additionally, teachers should stress correct writing to aid reading skills and instruct students on new word syllabification for proper articulation. Recognizing their significant role, teachers must foster a love of reading in their students.

Kumala et al. (2022) define teachers' perceptions as views shaped by their prior knowledge and experiences, influencing their behavior or decisions. Their study found that teachers with limited awareness of modern teaching technologies tend to rely on conventional methods. Various studies have explored students' difficulties in reading English. Alotaibi (2022) investigated reading challenges among Saudi EFL learners, finding similarities with other EFL learners, including limited vocabulary and difficulty understanding texts. Khan et al. (2020) examined elementary-level EFL learners' reading challenges through mixed methods and suggested focusing on specific areas to address these

difficulties. Yang (2012) found blended learning effective in improving college students' reading skills, while Bilikozen (2014) highlighted the role of linguistic competency, motivation, and prior knowledge in reading comprehension among Turkish students.

Anwar (2022) identified academic reading difficulties among Indonesian university students using mixed methods, revealing that understanding difficult words posed the greatest challenge. Hudson (2020) reviewed fluency interventions for elementary students, showing that repeated reading materials significantly improve oral reading fluency, especially with one-on-one facilitation by trained teachers. Most previous studies were conducted overseas. If Indonesian English teachers neglect the importance of reading skills, it could result in inadequate preparation, limited vocabulary growth, poor comprehension, reduced motivation, and missed opportunities (Nanda, 2020). Neglecting reading importance can severely hinder EFL students' academic development. Some studies focused on young learners or university students, while others did not specify the age group. Jayanti (2016) examined teachers' and students' perceptions and the difficulties encountered in reading English. This research was investigated how teachers perceive EFL students struggling with reading in a senior high school with low reading skills in Jember.

Several studies have explored teachers' perceptions of EFL students' reading obstacles. Sadeghi (2018) investigated barriers in teaching reading to English Language Learners (ELLs) and ways to overcome these obstacles. Using a mixed-method approach with 60 junior high school teachers from Zanjan, Iran, the study identified tailored vocabulary instruction, culturally relevant materials, a supportive learning environment, scaffolding instruction, and professional development as strategies to improve ELLs' reading skills. Jayanti (2016) compared students' and teachers' perceptions of reading difficulties, finding differing views on challenges such as vocabulary, text comprehension, and engagement. Teachers highlighted motivation, practice, and background knowledge as significant barriers, suggesting a need for interactive teaching methods and regular practice both in and out of the classroom.

Fitri and Ginting (2021) studied EFL teachers' perceptions of reading strategies in high schools, finding a positive view of reading strategies but varied implementation. Barriers included insufficient professional development, lack of resources, unmotivated students, and a rigid curriculum. The study recommended comprehensive training, diverse reading materials, and flexible

curricula to support effective reading strategies. Al-Jarrah and Ismail (2018) investigated reading comprehension difficulties among EFL learners in higher education, focusing on Arab students. The study revealed challenges in identifying text types and suggested collaborative efforts among educators, policymakers, and learners to address these issues. Haggag and Bakr (2020) examined teachers' perceptions of language learning difficulties, identifying a correlation between teachers' perceptions and their understanding of concepts, intervention techniques, class barriers, and assessment methods. The study highlighted the need for adequate training, resources, and effective assessment procedures to address these difficulties. Implementing targeted intervention techniques and consistent assessment procedures can significantly improve teaching effectiveness and student outcomes.

These studies underscore the importance of understanding teachers' perceptions to enhance teaching practices, address students' reading difficulties, and implement effective strategies. By investigating these perceptions and the associated challenges, educators can develop better approaches to support EFL students in mastering reading skills and achieving academic success.

Method

This chapter outlines the research design, context, participants, data collection, and data analysis methods. This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore teachers' perceptions of factors contributing to EFL students' reading difficulties and coping strategies within a specific context (Harrison et al., 2017). Ary et al. (2018) describe a case study as a research approach focusing on a single unit, such as an individual, group, organization, or program. Wellington (2015) highlights the strengths of case studies, including their illustrative, enlightening, and accessible nature, though they may lack replicability and generalizability. This method is effective for investigating complex situations with multiple factors and relationships (Yin, 2014). The research question, " What factors that drives teacher's perception of EFL students' reading difficulties and coping strategies?" benefits from the in-depth exploration, contextual understanding, and real-life examples provided by a case study approach (Stake, 1995).

The research conducted at an Islamic senior high school in Jember, East Java, Indonesia. This school has a slightly different system than other schools. This school use Islamic boarding school as their system. The school didn't allow

students to bring electronic tools, such as smartphone and laptop, which are these tools play important role in helping students during English teaching and learning process nowadays directly relates to the research objective on this research. This relationship can be understood in several ways. The first one is about impact on learning resources and engagement. Electronic tools provide students with access to wide rage of learning resources, including digital libraries, educational apps, and online exercises that can support reading development. Without these tools, students might lack the necessary resources to enhance their reading skills (Alghasab et al., 2019). Electronic tools can make learning more engaging and interactive which can particularly important for reading activities. The absence of such tools might reduce students' motivation to engage with reading materials (Warschauer & Mathuciak, 2010). This school also focusing in religious activity than formal activity. Those factors make the students of that school has low English reading skills. Because of those factors researcher interested in studying the teacher perception on students' reading skill obstacles.

The study involved a female EFL teacher from the Islamic senior high school in Jember, who has over ten years of experience teaching English to grades ten through twelve. Purposive sampling was used to select the participant relevant to the study. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, as this method allows for in-depth exploration of perspectives and nuanced insights (Monday, 2020). The interview was conducted using Indonesian. The researcher used interview guidelines when conducting the interview. Interview guidelines was an essential aspect for researchers to ensure consistency and focus during interviews. It was helped structure the conversation and ensure the key information relevant to the research topic is collected from participants. By having a predefined set of questions or topics to cover, the researcher can maintain direction and ensure that they gather necessary data without deviating too far from the research objectives. The interview content was arranged based on research question and literature review. The interview was done in Indonesian language to get more accurate information, avoid language barriers, and avoid misunderstanding. Additionally, interview guidelines helped researcher making analysis more systematic and reliable. This method facilitated a systematic and reliable analysis of the data, following Creswell's (2012) six-step model for qualitative data analysis, which includes data preparation, exploration, coding, description, theme formation, representation, interpretation, and validation.

Findings

This chapter present all the findings and discussion of the research and its analysis based on the research question. Finding of this research are data collected through interview and interview analysis. Thus, data analysis contains brief explanation of interview result, which is elaborated in the discussion.

The researcher outlines the result of interviews conducted to find out the teacher's perspective on EFL students' reading skill obstacles. The data collection technique was used interview which was conducted on June, 25th 2024 and 26th July 2024 with the English teacher of one of Islamic senior high school in Jember, East Java, Indonesia as participant of this research. Several questions were asked to the participant to collected the data. This research got three main findings, there are teacher's perception, reading difficulties and reading skills mastery.

First findings

The finding about teacher's perception explained that from the interviews with the EFL teacher, two main codes regarding teacher's perception were identified: influences on perception and impact on teaching methods. Teachers' perceptions are shaped by their prior knowledge, experiences, and familiarity with educational technologies (Kumala et al., 2020). The impact on teaching methods is evident when teachers lacking understanding of modern technology revert to traditional methods (Kumala, 2020).

> *"My difficulty in assessing students' reading skills to obtain accurate results is that it takes too much time. Because I have to record the students while reading and then listen to the recording then giving them proper score. So, it takes too much time for me to give a single score for each of them" (Interview no. 4, June 25th 2024)*

For instance, the teacher expressed difficulty in accurately assessing students' reading skills due to the time required to record and evaluate each student's reading (Interview, June 25, 2024). This time-consuming process may lead to a preference for quicker, less effective assessment methods.

> *"I usually teach the students how to read the words one by one, but the students still cannot pronounce a single English word in a clean and clear way." (Interview, July 26th 2024)*

Additionally, the teacher struggled with teaching pronunciation,

indicating a reliance on traditional methods due to a lack of familiarity with more effective techniques (Interview, July 26, 2024). These challenges highlight the need for better training and resources to equip teachers with modern strategies for teaching reading skills.

Second findings

The interviews highlighted three main codes regarding students' reading difficulties: limited exposure, ineffective study methods, and motivation issues. Limited exposure to English, due to restrictions on electronic devices at the school, affects language mastery and vocabulary development (Hayati, 2020).

> *"In my opinion, it is due to the limitations of the school facilities, as students are prohibited from using mobile phones and laptops in this boarding school"* *(Interview, June 25th 2024)*

The teacher noted that the prohibition of mobile phones and laptops limits students' access to diverse English language resources, hindering their ability to practice and engage with the language outside the classroom (Interview, June 25, 2024). Ineffective study methods, such as relying solely on dictionaries, were also identified.

> *"Usually, students who have a high motivation to learn English are students who academically successful. They are basically enthusiastic about learning. On the other hand, students who are less motivated in learning English typically have a low interest in studying in every subject."* *(Interview, June 25th 2024)*

> *"The first thing that affect students' motivation is the learning facility. Because in this boarding school students prohibited to bring electronic stuff like smartphone and laptop, which are important things to help students learning especially English in this era. Therefore, for self-study, students will definitely face more difficulties than students from other school who have access to smartphones and laptop. So, students in this school can only rely on dictionary book in order to learn English which is insufficient for the learning process."* *(Interview, June 25th 2024)*

The teacher mentioned that motivated students tend to perform better academically, whereas those with low motivation struggle across subjects (Interview, June 25, 2024). The restriction on electronic devices exacerbates this issue by reducing students' engagement with interactive and practical learning

experiences. Encouraging practical and engaging English learning experiences could help boost motivation and academic success. This situation limits their engagement with the language in real-life contexts and contributes to decreased motivation. Access to modern learning tools such as smartphones and laptops can provide interactive and in-depth experiences that enhances reading skills and increase motivation. This aligns with the findings of Kumala et al (2020) who noted that importance of effective and modern educational strategies.

Third findings

The third finding is about reading skill mastery. The interview responses were categorized into five essential components of reading skills: alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness, reading fluency, vocabulary mastery, and reading comprehension (Paris, 2011).

> *"The students' understanding of the alphabetic principle, in my opinion, is quite good Although there is still a Madurese accent, the students know how to read most letters separately." (Interview, July 26th 2024)*

The teacher noted that students had a good understanding of the alphabetic principle, although their pronunciation was influenced by a regional accent (Interview, July 26, 2024).

> *"The students' understanding of the alphabetic principle, in my opinion, is quite good Although there is still a Madurese accent, the students know how to read most letters separately." (Interview, July 26th 2024)*

However, phonemic awareness was very basic, with students' reading heavily accented, indicating a need for targeted phonemic exercises (Interview, July 26, 2024).

> *"Students' reading fluency is not really good, perhaps only few students have good reading fluency." (Interview, June 25th 2024)*

Reading fluency was generally low, with only a few students demonstrating good fluency (Interview, June 25, 2024).

> *"The students' vocabulary skills are quite low because when they only engage in reading activities, they often struggle to understand the meaning of the text. Unless I ask them to translate it in groups." (Interview, June 25th 2024)*

Low vocabulary skills were also a significant barrier to text

comprehension, necessitating group translation activities to aid understanding (Interview, June 25, 2024).

> *To assist students in reading and understanding the text, I dictate it first. Then, students take turn reading it. This way, they can learn how to read the text before actually doing so. to understand the meaning of each text, I usually ask the students to form groups and translate the text together. This allows the students to collaborate in understanding the meaning of the text." (Interview, June 25th 2024)*

The use of group work and dictation to improve comprehension was noted as an effective strategy, suggesting that collaborative learning can enhance reading skills (Interview, June 25, 2024).

Overall, the research identified significant challenges in EFL reading skill instruction, such as limited exposure, ineffective study methods, and motivational issues, largely due to restrictions on modern educational tools. Addressing these issues through better facilities and engaging learning experiences is crucial for enhancing students' reading skills and motivation. The limitations of this research include having only one participant, which may affect the accuracy of the findings. Involving more participants could provide a broader perspective. Additionally, the research relied solely on interview data without supporting evidence, such as student grades or interviews with students to confirm the teacher's perceptions.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by EFL students and teachers in this specific context. Future research should consider including multiple participants and additional data sources to validate and expand upon these findings. Providing teachers with better training and resources, as well as incorporating modern educational tools, could significantly improve the quality of EFL instruction and student outcomes in reading skills.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research investigated the factors contributing to EFL students' reading difficulties from the teacher's perspective and identified coping strategies used to address these challenges. The findings highlighted that lack of vocabulary, limited exposure to the target language, and insufficient practice opportunities are the main factors causing reading

difficulties. Teacher employed strategies such as teaching the alphabetic principle, demonstrating phonemic awareness, conducting vocabulary-building exercises, practicing reading fluency, providing additional reading materials, and creating language experiences to help students improve their reading skills. These results suggest that targeted interventions focusing on vocabulary and practice can significantly enhance reading proficiency. However, the study's small sample size and reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias. Future research should examine the effectiveness of specific interventions in diverse educational settings and include larger, more varied samples to validate these findings. Overall, this research offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by EFL students and provides practical solutions for teachers to improve reading instruction, thereby better supporting students in developing essential reading skills for academic and personal success. To address the findings, the Islamic Senior High School should consider allowing the use of smartphones and laptops or providing computers or a language lab to help students access unlimited learning resources and develop their reading skills. Additionally, the school should offer a greater variety of textbooks to stimulate interest in learning English reading skills. Teachers should diversify their learning materials beyond textbooks to maintain student interest, persistently teach students with low interest, and adopt more efficient assessment methods that provide immediate feedback and scores.

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